

Eli Jordan

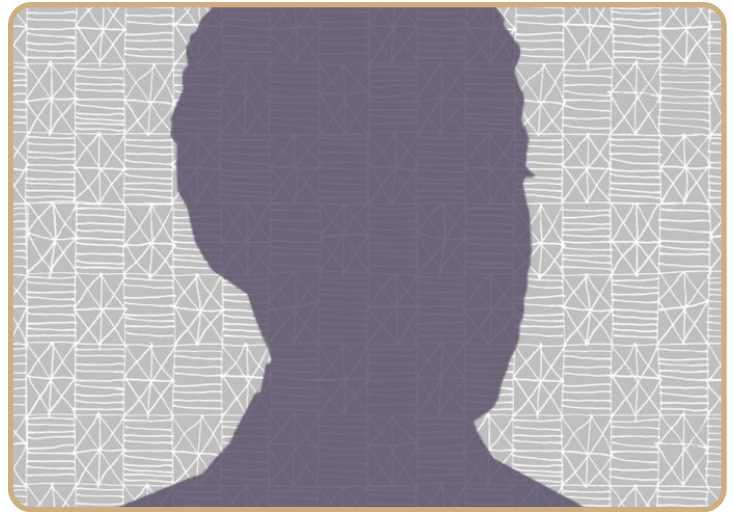
Author: Yvonne Giles, Research Consultant

Places: Lexington, Fayette County, Kentucky; Frankfort, Franklin County, Kentucky; Louisville, Jefferson County, Kentucky

Birth: June 1823

Death: September 22, 1908

Professions: Hostler, Trainer



Early Years and Family

Eli Jordan, born into slavery, spent his early years in Lexington, Kentucky. He lived on Fifth Street near the Kentucky Association racetrack in East Lexington and worked as a hostler.¹ Archive records show that he had married and was father to four daughters. When he married Belle Douglass in 1877, she became stepmother to Jordan's daughters.²

Trainer for Williams and Owings Stables

From 1875 to 1877, Jordan was employed as trainer with the stables of James T. Williams and Richard Owings. Jordan's knowledge and experience would be tested as he worked with young Thoroughbred colts and fillies. In the stable were:

- Artistic
- Classmate
- Congressman
- Creedmoor
- Schoolmate
- Spring Branch
- Vera Cruz
- Waterwitch

Creedmoor, under Jordan's skill, outperformed the other Thoroughbreds. In 1875, the two-year-old won the Young America and Tennessee Stakes. As a three-year-old in 1876, the stallion finished first in the Cumberland Stakes, the Clark Handicap, St. Leger Stakes and finished second in the Kentucky Derby.³

Trainer for Fleetwood Stables

In 1878, Jordan and his family moved to Frankfort, Kentucky. He had been hired as trainer for Fleetwood Stable.⁴

Jordan had been working for two years when Reynolds suddenly died. Meta, Reynold's widow, continued to manage the stable with Jordan's help. She married Llewellyn P. Tarleton in 1883. Jordan continued to train the stables' Thoroughbreds. He also supervised the three stable hands, one horse trainer, and five jockeys who were employed.⁵

Jordan, for over twenty-five years, oversaw the care, training, and racing of Thoroughbreds:

- Blue Eyes
- Clarissima
- Falsetto
- Fortuna
- Outbound
- Whisper

Jordan's conditioning of Falsetto became evident when the stallion, at age three, won the:

- Kenner Stakes
- Travers Stakes
- Clark Handicap
- Phoenix Hotel Stakes

Falsetto finished in second place in the Kentucky Derby and was named Horse of the Year in 1879. The stallion later sired three Kentucky Derby winners. Chant won in 1884; His Eminence won in 1901 and Sir Huon won in 1906.⁶

Mentoring Jockeys

While Jordan trained Thoroughbreds, he also mentored and tutored young boys who became jockeys. Shelby Barnes, John Stoval, George Knox, Tommie Britton and Isaac Murphy were among them.

In 1891, Jordan revealed information about Isaac Murphy whom he had known as a child. Jordan's first wife and Isaac's mother, America, were great friends. They moved into Jordan's household just as baby Isaac was learning to walk. When ten-year-old Isaac was strong enough to hold a bridle, Jordan began to train him to ride. He was quick, said Jordan, and rapidly mastered the secrets of successful jockey riding.⁷ Although Murphy was riding for the Fleetwood Stable, Jordan encouraged him to accept contracts from other owners. He did. Isaac Murphy became a highly paid star athlete in the 1880s.

Achievements, Death and Legacy

Jordan's skills, knowledge and devotion to horses kept him employed throughout his lifetime.

His greatest achievement was the training and support he provided to two young boys who became exceptional jockeys. Isaac Murphy and Shelby Barnes were inducted into the National Museum of Racing Hall of Fame.⁸

Eli Jordan died in Louisville, Kentucky and was buried in the Louisville Cemetery. Records confirm his internment, but his grave site is unmarked.⁹

Jordan's name and influence in the industry forever remain in the annals of Thoroughbred racing.

Sources

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Footnotes

¹1870 U.S. Census, population schedules

²Tenth Census of the United States, 1880.

³Kentucky Live Stock Record. "Horses in Training." February 26, 1875

⁴Breckenridge News. 1876–1955. "Louisville Jockey Club Grounds." October 30, 1878

⁵Tenth Census of the United States, 1880. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration. 1880

⁶The Thoroughbred Record. "Falsetto." July 30, 1904

⁷Lexington Leader. 1891. "Ike Murphy's Real Name." July 29, 1891.

⁸National Museum of Racing Hall of Fame Jockeys. accessed March 19, 2021. <https://www.racingmuseum.org>

⁹Lexington Leader. 1908. "Eli Jordan." September 25, 1908